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Falling Down the Federal Deficit Rabbit Hole

One of the first things I learned as a business owner was that the only way a business can thrive is when incoming revenue exceeds outgoing costs. It may sound simple. The concept, itself, is. A person, a business, and a government cannot spend money they do not have and certainly not when drowning in debt. However, this basic rule has eluded the current Administration, as it has announced the largest federal deficit in the history of the United States. The federal debt is so exorbitant that the amount the government has borrowed threatens to surpass the \$7.4 trillion debt limit. The current fiscal policy is digging the American people into a financial hole with no plan of escape.

On July 30th, the Administration announced the budget deficit would reach \$445 billion in 2004. This is \$70 billion more than last year's \$375 billion deficit and \$707 billion more than the Administration forecasted in 2001. The government also expects to bump the national debt ceiling by late September or early October, making it unable to fund government operations past November. Faced with the prospect of being unable to pay the bills this fall, Treasury Secretary John Snow urged Congress to raise the debt limit above the current level of \$7.4 trillion. Asking Congress for approval to borrow record amounts of money to fund a \$445 billion debt demonstrates the extent our government's fiscal health has deteriorated since the surpluses of 2000. As a fiscal conservative, I believe this is unacceptable.

One of my proudest accomplishments during my tenure in the House of Representatives was the bipartisan budget plan developed in 1997. This plan produced a balanced budget four years in a row and resulted in budget surpluses in 1999 and 2000. It required mutual sacrifices by both Republicans and Democrats, and for the first time in decades, a Democratic President and a Republican Congress succeeded in running back-to-back surpluses without relying on funds from Social Security.

Fiscal success stories like this are the main goal of the Blue Dog Coalition of which I am a member. The Blue Dogs are comprised of Democrats in the House of Representatives dedicated to developing reasonable, responsible and realistic solutions to the federal deficit. I have joined my colleagues in the Blue Dog Coalition in establishing a proposal to get America back on the road to financial freedom. Our plan combines spending restraints with strong budget enforcement measures and responsible tax policy. The Blue Dog budget cuts the deficit in half in two years and achieves a balanced budget by the year 2012. In addition, I have cosponsored legislation ensuring we have the tools necessary to control spending and prevent future tax cuts from increasing the federal budget deficit.

It is imperative for the federal government to provide an economic model for families and businesses. It should set an example for all Americans as to the importance of establishing priorities and making sacrifices when necessary. As a country, we need to identify our national priorities and guarantee we have the resources to implement them in any budget we develop. Asking Congress to raise the debt ceiling is a bad habit that is not a long-term solution to the problem.

The American people are the investors in the company we call the United States. However, unlike the average business, there are dire consequences heaped onto the backs of every American when the government is fiscally irresponsible. Year after year, as our debt continues to balloon beyond control, we are leaving a legacy of overspending to our children and grandchildren. This overwhelming burden is not what I wish to pass on to future generations. With bipartisan cooperation, a balanced budget is an attainable goal, and that is why I will continue to work in Congress for fiscal responsibility.

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